

sexualities
past reflections, future directions
edited by sally hines and yvette taylor

GENDERS AND SEXUALITIES IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES



Genders and Sexualities in the Social Sciences

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Genders and Sexualities in the Social Sciences

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Sexualities: Past Reflections, Future Directions

Edited by

Sally Hines

University of Leeds

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Notes on Contributors

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Rachel Jones-Wild recently completed a PhD entitled 'A Gay Nuclear Family? How Do Gay Men and Lesbians Experience and Conceptualise Family?' in the School of Geography, Politics and Sociology at Newcastle University. The research focused on changing meanings of family and the ways in which gay men and lesbians in the Newcastle area experience their intimate lives in the light of recent policy changes such as the Civil Partnership Act. She is currently interested in psychotherapy and the experiences of LGB clients accessing talking therapies.

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Eve Shapiro is an Assistant Professor at Westfield State University, USA. Her study of drag kings has been published in *Gender & Society* and *Sexualities* as well as in several edited volumes. Her book *Gender Circuits: Bodies and Identities in a Technological Age* (Routledge, 2010) explores the impact of new biomedical and information technologies on the gendered lives of cisgender and transgender individuals, and her current research further elaborates the dynamic relationships between body, identity and community. She is also Associate Editor of the *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society* (Sage, 2008).

Eliza Steinbock obtained her BA with an emphasis on gender and sexuality studies from The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington (2003) and was awarded her MA in Cultural Studies (with distinction) from the University of Leeds, UK (2004). She held a four-year research fellowship at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis at the University of Amsterdam for her doctoral project, entitled 'Shimmering Images: On Transgender Embodiment and Cinematic Experience', which conducts an interdisciplinary encounter between transgender studies and film studies by developing their shared, although differently inflected, concepts. Her publications include guest editing an issue of *Parallax* 'Installing the Body' (Spring 2008 with Maaïke Bleeker) and the chapter 'Speaking Transsexuality in the Cinematic Tongue' in *Somatechnics: Queering the Technologicalisation of Bodies* (edited by N. Sullivan and S. Murray; Ashgate, 2009). Her fields of interest include aesthetics, visual culture and corporeal feminist theory. Eliza currently holds a faculty member position in the Humanities Department at Amsterdam University College.

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European Societies; Sociological Research Online; Women's Studies International Forum; Sexualities, Feminism and Psychology; Feminist Theory; Gender, Place and Culture. Yvette is currently working on an ESRC standard grant 'Making space for queer identifying religious youth'.

Jane Ward is Associate Professor of Women's Studies at the University of California Riverside. She is the author of *Respectably Queer* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2008), as well as several articles on queer politics, transgender relationships, the social construction of heterosexuality, the failure of diversity programs and, most recently, queer motherhood. She teaches courses in feminist and queer studies.

Eleanor Wilkinson completed her PhD 'Spaces of Love' in the School of Geography at the University of Leeds. Her research interests are in the areas of gender, sexuality, friendship, love and intimacy, and in the geographies of ageing. She has published articles in journals including *Sexualities*, *Social and Cultural Geography* and *Emotion, Space and Society*. She has recently been awarded a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship which is for working on age and single people.

Introduction

The last decade has witnessed an explosion of academic interest in sexuality within the social sciences and humanities, with sexuality at the centre of groundbreaking work across a broad range of academic disciplines. At national and international levels, the past decade has also seen an increasing focus on sexuality, as sexuality has become part of a policy turn towards equality and diversity. These developments make this edited collection extremely timely. The collection reflects a current wave of interdisciplinary work, which offers new ways of conceptualizing and researching sexuality. In turn, such interdisciplinary work turns its attention to persistently marginalized sexual practices, subjectivities and identities. As well as considering interdisciplinary issues that are at the forefront of contemporary cultural and social enquiry, the book bridges the gap between theory, research methods and practice, and lived experiences of sexuality. At a time when sexuality studies is, arguably, moving beyond its long-time marginal position within the academy, the collection elaborates theoretical and methodological frameworks that allow more complex analyses of the relationship between sexuality and its intersections with other methodological and theoretical traditions. Such developments are important to enable researchers across the humanities and social sciences to develop nuanced analyses of 'lived experiences' of sexuality; considering for example, the relationships between social structures and sexual inequalities, and the ways in which embodiment, space and place impact upon sexual identities and experiences; themes which are central to the chapters in this collection.

Implicit within the 'reflections' and 'futures', which this collection attends to, is a concern with the production of knowledge across time and place. Where sexualities studies has been positioned as an (albeit growing) 'niche market' there is a need to highlight resonating legacies, intersectional knowledge and broader social pictures, where these are subject to dismissal *and* mainstreaming, as condensing and curtailing techniques (Taylor, Hines and Casey, 2010). The queer academic is encouraged, hastened, to change her

academic 'five key words' when she declares that 'lesbian' and 'working class' are still reappearing on the mainstreamed page. The pause – and repetition – is suggestive of what becomes excessive knowledge, a messy contribution, a 'past' which should – even if embodied – be given up for projections into another, different, academic future (Taylor, 2009a). But the queer academic(s) insist: in advancing approaches we won't just be moved on, displaced, in the call to the new and the mobile. Being attentive to specific sexual subjects (e.g., the queer subject as an intervention/alternative/challenge) needs to be connected to normative and mainstreaming processes both politically and socially; heterosexual lives and (hetero)normativities now feature alongside discussion of *homonormative* lives, identities and policies. And shifting terrains of 'winning worlds' (Weeks, 2007) sit alongside critique of such 'worlds' as always particular, constructed via class, racial and gender inequalities (Taylor, 2007, 2009b; Hines, 2007; Stella, 2010; McDermott, 2011).

Attending to sexual advancements is both a methodological question and a theoretical challenge – both as an accounting of 'past' concerns, and where these have taken us, and as a mobilization of the 'future' as a querying of who 'we' are now: what futures are brought forward in developing new methodological approaches? Do interdisciplinary innovations fracture or solidify disciplinary claims on the (re)production of 'proper' knowledges, even in a shifting sexual landscape? How are claims to 'Theory' with a capital T – and sometimes capital Q (Queer) – made via 'new' revisions, which often cast out 'old' legacies? Is such a capitalization part of a world we want to 'win' as scholars with investments in sexualities studies? This collection engages with such issues, asking what subject, spaces, knowledges, are capitalized, made visible and viable, and which cannot be claimed as 'coming forward' in these currencies (Binnie, 2004; McRobbie, 2008; Taylor, 2009b, 2010a). In advancing approaches, contributors variously pay attention to what methods and theories are moving; how these are movable; and what subjects become (im)mobile in shifting sexual maps.

Part 1 of the book, *'Moving Methods, Moving Theories? Advancing Approaches'*, attends to questions of revisions and (re)constitutions, probing at whose lives – and where – are rendered, recuperated, and lost, in the economies of (not) knowing. In Chapter 1, 'Reflexive Sexualities and Reflexive Sociology', Brian Heaphy queries the positioning of sexual identities and lifestyles as 'reflexive' in terms of a self-conscious, self-defining orientation. Such a query (re)emerges from long-standing feminist criticism of 'ideal', 'mobile', even 'choosing' reflexive subjects, who can reorientate themselves at will, and plan, change and revise their biographies as good, knowing, even responsible subjects (Adkins 2000, 2002; Taylor, 2009b). Yet Heaphy's concern is less with reflexive sexual subject *per se* – in acknowledgement of the privileged experience therein – and more with developing a 'reflexive sociology'. This involves a consideration of recent theories that associate lesbian

and gay identities and lifestyles with reflexive empowered agency in everyday living and investigation of reflexivity as a methodological issue. The former venture – of highlighting the privilege within certain, even ‘queer’, lives – is certainly shared and many now empirically explore the continued relevance of class, race and gender: the frustration, however, remains when these become caveats or gestures, as ‘special’ exemptions, not queer enough, or perhaps too queer. And there are variations within ‘queerness’ and within viable, visible heterosexual and LGBT lives. Methodologically, the task, for Heaphy, is to acknowledge the partiality of subject matters, conclusions and politics, as part of a ‘reflexive sociology’. This all seems sensible and indeed emergent from feminist ‘standpoint’ theory, to feminist poststructuralist thought. There is, following Heaphy, a real need to situate knowledges beyond just ourselves, moving too beyond the well-rehearsed ‘great and good’ academics whose own self-reflexivity emerges as a point *to and away* from themselves.

In Chapter 2, ‘The Affect of Methods’, Jacqui Gabb focuses attention on methodological approaches in studying everyday aspects of family relationships and intimate life. The move to the ‘everyday’ is in sharp contrast to the spectacular, sensational, spending sexual subjects of leisure and commercial ‘scene spaces’ (Gabb, 2008; Taylor, 2008; Casey, 2010). Importantly, Gabb demonstrates how different methods produce distinctive kinds of data. Researchers are, as we know, not simply data gatherers, but are themselves intimately involved in the constructions of meanings, use and value, deciding what data to deliver and disseminate. This is challenged in more participatory methodological approaches, which literally write different lives on to the academic map. Gabb discusses visual methods and diaries, and the kinds of auto/biographical data these produce, as more able to grasp (inter)relatedness across the life course. All too often (sexual) subjects are extracted from wider social-structural relations, a process which is itself profoundly gendered, when we consider the gendering of intimate life worlds and ‘public-private affective repertoires’ (Hines, 2007; Gabb, 2008; Taylor, 2009b).

In Chapter 3, ‘To Pass Without Hindrance: Citizenship, Community, Diversity – or Death’, Yvette Taylor is similarly critical of the exclusion of certain ‘futures’ via the narrative of the good family, resourcing the good child as future citizen, and inhabiting their ‘proper’ private place, as a profoundly classed and racialized positioning. This assertion builds on Taylor’s work on the intersection between sexuality and class where not everyone can ‘pass without hindrance’, whether that is in accessing education, employment and housing, or in exercising a ‘right to use’ reproductive technologies, scene spaces. Intersections of sexuality and class are present in everyday choices, capitals and confidences (Taylor, 2007). Taylor’s chapter considers moments of US and UK sexual citizenship, situating this in terms of LGBT campaigning groups’ actions, institutional reactions and

broad public relations. Expanding upon Heaphy's critique of privileged LGBT lives, Taylor suggests that reactions and demands often work to recreate a dominant 'we', while the rhetorics of 'diversity' and 'community' are strategically deployed – implying inclusivity while exercising exclusion. Her argument is discussed in relation to two significant moments of citizenship formations and disruptions: the UK Civil Partnership Act (2004) and the interrelated movement towards demanding 'safety', 'protection' and an end to homophobia, following the deaths of a number of queer youth in the United States, particularly in relation to suicide of Tyler Clementi following a suspected act of homophobia. These examples are mapped on to UK empirical fieldwork (Taylor, 2009b) as a (dis)connection between two sites with similar struggles. In comparing these two (inhabited) locales, Taylor attempts to make broader resonances rather than to 'locate' homophobia solely within the sites, examples, spaces and bodies discussed, whilst also avoiding talking for 'everywhere'. Her account is partially self-reflexive, while hopefully not self-absorbed: in charting movements often our own occupation is politically and ethically relevant. But it is certainly not the whole story.

In Chapter 4, 'Telling Personal Stories in Academic Research Publications: Reflexivity, Intersubjectivity and Contextual Positionalities', Christian Klesse continues to both utilize and query a self-reflexive stance as he reflects upon his research into gay male and bisexual non-monogamous and polyamorous relationships in the United Kingdom in the period between 1997 and 2003 (see also Klesse, 2007). Both innovations and shortcomings are signalled in the telling of stories; how do these circulate and come to count (or not)? Who listens to these? How do they carry – or fail? (Adkins, 2002; Skeggs, 2002; Taylor, 2010b). Klesse suggests that critical re-readings act as vantage point for exploring wider issues. Like Heaphy, he suggests that these act to both situate researchers as well as compelling us to move beyond ourselves: in short, the work of reflexive practice starts rather than stops with ourselves. Klesse discusses positionality with regard to the interconnected categories of gender, sexuality, ethnicity/race and nationality, as well as the question of eroticism in the research process. It is not always a straightforward invocation of voice and visibility, and enduring silences are noted in particular with regard to age, transgender and class (Hines, 2007; Taylor, 2007; Erel, Haritaworn, Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Klesse, 2010). Some particular methodological approaches are usefully provided by Klesse, who ultimately argues for a refined concept of positionality where 'being reflexive' is not enough.

In Chapter 5, 'Born This Way: Congenital Heterosexuals and the Making of Heteroflexibility', Jane Ward discusses the new visibility of straight men's homosexual desire which, she suggests, produces a demand for 'sex experts'. Again, this chapter raises questions about the construction of knowledges and the disconnect between differently positioned 'experts': who, exactly, has the right, authority or simply good sense to evaluate,

measure and even ‘fix’ or diagnose sexual desires? Cultural – rather than academic – ‘sex experts’ are increasingly tasked with explaining to worried and experimenting publics the psychological, cultural, homosocial and institutional causes behind ‘new’ sexual patterns. Ward aims to contextualize and analyse the way that the same-sex desires of heterosexuals are being conceptualized across a range of cultural and institutional realms in the United States, often as a new ‘heteroflexibility’. Yet in exploring what is at stake in such evolving constructions of heterosexuality, Ward highlights the mechanisms that protect, justify and normalize the same-sex desires and sexual experiences of heterosexuals. Rather than understanding these as moments of ‘flexibility’ or shifts, Ward positions these as indicative of heteroexceptionalism, which recuperates itself precisely through these ‘exceptional’ interruptions. Heteroexceptionalism works to ensure that heterosexuals can engage in the very same-sex acts while also ensuring that these encounters remain culturally meaningless, structurally inconsequential, and scientifically discernible from ‘authentic’ homosexuality. Ward charts the legacies and contemporary inflections of real, authentic, medicalized sexualities; new commentaries emerge in movements of apparent shift, but often these work to reconstitute rather than erode sexual hierarchies. Again this is understood as a reinscription of pervasive binaries (normativity vs. criminalization), where straight homosexuality remains heavily invested in sexual and gender norms.

In Chapter 6, ‘Straight Indiscretions or Queer Hypocrites: Public Negotiations of Identity and Sexual Behaviour’, Eve Shapiro continues the explorations of sex scandals – even when these are recovered and made exceptional. Such scandals are not, in an age of increasing ‘sexual stories’, isolated, yet they are often enduringly fascinating, as sexuality is seen to say more about us than other identities or practices. Shapiro highlights the fascination – and disgust – with heterosexual political and religious figures caught engaging in non-heterosexual desires and behaviours. Rather than forcing an interrogation of the complicated nature of sexuality, these media highlights are culturally and socially explained as sexual and moral infringements. Rather differently, but still resonating with Ward’s chapter, Shapiro highlights the re-drawing and limitations of sexual and gender norms where same-sex acts become ‘unmistakable evidence’ of sexual identity. Such a collapsing is resisted by Shapiro as she extends her analysis beyond the confines US- and UK-based ‘sexual scandals’ in order to highlight the wider unbraiding of sex, gender, outside the theoretical space of queer theory.

In Chapter 7, ‘The Romantic Imaginary: Compulsory Coupledness and Single Existence’, Eleanor Wilkinson suggests a replacement of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ – or a ‘heterosexual imaginary’ – with a new ‘romantic imaginary’ which persists, and is even reinforced, amidst legislative changes which now allow for other non-heterosexual forms of intimate attachments.

At the precise moment that cultural and social change facilitates supposedly diverse and different relations, processes of re-traditionalization operate to produce new limitations, guidance and boundaries around these 'new choices'. Echoing Ward's approach, Wilkinson finds evidence of the 'romantic imaginary' in expert psychological and medical diagnosis – which aim to fix our romantic attachments as properly 'loving' and 'coupled'. In light of the optimism circulated and celebrated as new freedoms and lifestyles, Wilkinson's chapter is a timely reminder of enduring constraints, and indeed old-new binds within relational ties, which remain hidden as optimistic pronouncements of 'choice' and 'freedom' are declared. Like Taylor in Chapter 3, Wilkinson highlights the normative enforcement of (romantic) 'love' as a guiding principle for citizenship inclusions and claims, which then expel others (those deemed 'hateful' or 'ill'); these are negotiated interpersonally and in everyday intimate life as well as in and through community activism, where 'queer' spaces and subjects are not always coupled or realized.

The (non)academic spaces, subjectivities and sexualities which Part 1 explores differently highlight moments of contestation as well as movements towards reincorporation, where sexuality is understood as constant, normal or deviant, straight or gay. Against this it reveals the messiness and complication of everyday lives, as well as 'gaps' in empirically understanding such lives – as well as locating ourselves (as researchers) in and through these (as more than 'data gathering'). Part 1, *Moving Methods, Moving Theories? Advancing Approaches*, implies an engaged, even emotional, effort whereby the *advancement* involves a political commitment across the margins and mainstreams. The complications and messiness of everyday lives are further drawn out in the book's second part, *Lived Experiences: Equality and Diversity*. Together, the chapters in Part 2 articulate the spectrum of sexual practices and diverse ways of living personal life in the twenty-first century. An overriding theme of this part of the book is the articulation of the ways in which sexuality intersects with other identity markers, such as gender, space and place and embodiment, to map how cultural formations and social divisions interconnect and impact upon sexuality on both a structural and subjective level. Running through the chapters is the interrogation of current citizenship transformations and the consequences of these for sexual subjects who remain outside of recent practices of 'inclusion'. A number of chapters thus explore current shifts in understandings and practices of sexual equality and diversity across policy and legal sites; critically exploring the institutionalization of sexual 'equalities' discourse, examining the impact of recent legal and policy developments on subjective experiences of sexuality and intimacy, and on political movements and cultures, and linking the nation state and globalization to 'everyday' spaces and practices.

The first chapter in this part, Chapter 8, 'Reimagining Families of Choice' by Rachel Jones, is situated within recent sociological debates surrounding

family pluralities – both in meaning and lived experience. Jones's chapter explores the meanings of 'family of choice' (Weston, 1991) and reconsiders what might be understood by a family of choice. Rather than being an exclusive marker of same-sex intimate relationships, Jones considers the concept of a family of choice as potentially encompassing all relationships that are actively and voluntarily maintained. Such practices, she thus suggests, are more than a 'gay way of doing things.' In exploring the role of friendship to relationships that 'matter', the chapter contributes to a growing sociology of friendship (Pahl, and Pevalin; 2005; Roseneil, 2005; Budgeon, 2006). More widely, Jones argues that the creation of families of choice enable, and are enabled by, both the redefinition of the meanings and the experiences of 'family'. Subsequently, friendship and families of choice encourage empowering processes; particularly for those with a precarious experience of, and a claim to, family to find legitimacy and recognition for their intimate relationships.

Pathways to legitimacy and recognition are also central to Chapter 9, 'The Politics of Sexuality in Portugal: Confronting Tradition, Enacting Change', by Ana Cristina Santos. Santos considers social and political changes since the Portuguese revolution for democracy in 1974. In examining the relationship between same-sex individuals and relational claims and socio-legal developments, Santos suggests that 'value-discourses' (Williams and Roseneil, 2004) concerning 'the family' and 'the child' structure a paradoxical citizenship terrain for LGBT people in Portugal. On the one hand, Santos argues, the Portuguese Constitution provides protection from discrimination for LGBT on an individual level, yet, on the other, the heteronormative assumptions of the law result in discriminating legal practices. Such tensions are considered in relation to recent legal changes that enable same-sex marriage in Portugal. Despite the continued dominance of heteronormative value-discourses, Santos suggests that legal change in this area has been possible due to the role of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender movements. Recent legal change also highlights, Santos suggests, the ways in which the state is willing to compensate – via legal recognition – those same-sex intimate citizens who embrace dominant values of 'respectability'. Chapter 9 thus points to how legal change often assigns rights to some sections of previously marginalized sexual communities at the expense of others; a theme which is central to the next chapter.

In Chapter 10, 'Stirring it Up – Again: A Politics of Difference in the New Millennium', Sally Hines addresses debates within citizenship literature and queer theory around assimilation and 'homonormativity' (Duggan, 2003), which point to the ways in which, as indicated in the previous chapter, 'respectability' is central to processes of state 'recognition'. Through an analysis of the 2004 UK Gender Recognition Act (GRA), Hines examines the ways in which recent legal change affords rights to some trans people while excluding others; thus constructing a two-tier framework of citizenship.

Against a wholly pessimistic reading of social and cultural change, however, Hines suggests an emergence of a 'new queer politics', which stands in opposition to a neoliberal model of rights and recognition. In evidencing dissent within sections of LGBT communities in light of the Gender Recognition Act and the Civil Partnership Act in the United Kingdom, and in relation to debates around 'Don't Ask Don't Tell' policy in the United States, Hines suggests the emergence of a politics of 'non-recognition'. Hines thus signposts the beginnings of a political sea change – a move to a new queer politics – where those members of gender and sexual communities who find themselves on the margins of recent legal and policy shifts around inclusion reject notions and practices of recognition in favour of a politics of difference.

A politics of difference runs through Davina Cooper's consideration of the potentials for developing new queer and feminist spaces. In Chapter 11, 'Caring for Sex and the Power of Attentive Action: Governance, Drama, and Conflict in Building a Queer Feminist Bathhouse', Cooper theorizes the relationship between power and care through an understanding of care as a process of 'attentive action'. Taking Toronto women and trans bathhouse as her focal study, Cooper explores the processes of 'erotic care' enacted by bathhouse organizers as they sought to create a space for the expression and experiences of queer female sexualities. The chapter focuses on four registers of care, or forms of 'attentive action': organizational governance, collective erotic interest, agonistic sex, and social drama. In theorizing the intersecting and multiple ways that power operated within this site, Chapter 11 foregrounds the importance of care to processes of power in this 'alter-normative' site – a site that neither replicated mainstream norms nor sought just to invert them. For Cooper, an ethic of 'erotic care' was an energizing and enabling source of power in the management and organization of a space dedicated to queer female sexuality.

The possibilities and complexities of creating 'new' sexual spaces informs Chapter 12, '"Shanghai Goes West": A Story of the Development of a Commercial Gay Scene in China', by Camilla Bassi. Exploration of the recent expansion of a commercial gay scene in Shanghai is framed through Bassi's questioning of the merits of a universal analysis when looking beyond the twentieth-century history of Western capitalist development. In exploring the relationship between sexuality and capitalism as both enabling and constraining – capitalism is always in motion, constantly bringing forth new conditions – Chapter 12 points to the importance of analysing the spacial specificities of capitalism. In the case of Shanghai, this is reflected in a unique interplay of the market and the state, and the city and 'the West', which, in turn, Bassi argues, shows the need for locally specific analysis in future research theorizing the globalization of sexuality.

In Chapter 13, 'A Radical Opening: An Exploration of Lesbian/Queer BDSM Public Sexual Cultures', Corie Hammers explores 'transient' sexual practices within the context of queer BDSM spaces and cultures to consider the ways in which pleasure transfigures bodies and subjectivities. Understanding the 'transient' as the production of affects and as a site that links the erotic and the mundane, Hammers seeks to further queer theorizations of pleasure. Developing a queer sociology (Seidman, 1994; Hines, 2007), the chapter empirically considers the relationship between desire, subjectivity and embodiment; stressing how the sexual and the social interlock. Hammers analyses the narratives of women BDSM practitioners as 'resistive stories'; thus BDSM is positioned as means by which past traumas are reconfigured to empower and enable new sexual imaginaries.

Zowie Davy and Eliza Steinbock's chapter 'Sexing it Up: Contemporary Representations of Transgender Sexuality' provides a further consideration of marginalized sexual imaginaries. Chapter 14 explores the pornographic imagination within the context of medical understandings of trans sexualities, which are formed through a paradoxical understanding of both excess and denial. Focusing particularly on FtM erotica, Davy and Steinbock show the significance of 'erotic role models' that not only focus on the transitioning body, but begin from the body itself. The chapter reads trans porn as a challenge to medical understandings of transsexual sexualities, and this emerging genre is positioned as a significant social site whereby the transitioning body is produced as a sexual body.

The bringing to light of 'hidden' sexualities is central to the last chapter in the collection, Chapter 15, 'Past, Present and Future: Exploring the Sexual Identities of People with Learning Disabilities', by Ruth Garbutt. Garbutt's chapter begins with a historical consideration of the ways in which medical understandings discouraged and denied sexuality for people with learning disabilities. Though over the last two decades there has been a move towards 'normalization' through UK policies and practices that encourage de-institutionalization and community inclusion, Chapter 15 explores how misconceptions and fear continue to impact negatively upon the sexual subjectivities and experiences of young people with learning disabilities. A history of negativity and bad practice persists, Garbutt argues, in discriminating against the sexual rights of young people with learning disabilities. The chapter thus points to the need to develop future policy and practice which challenges these processes of sexual exclusion.

Future policy and practice, theories and methods, and ways of understanding and living sexuality in the twenty-first century are central to the overarching concerns of both parts of the collection and emerge as key themes across the individual chapters. At a time of increasing social, cultural and political change at the levels of the local and the global – and in the midst of upheavals within higher education – it is vital that

sexuality remains at the forefront of groundbreaking work in the social sciences and humanities. *Sexualities: Past Reflections, Future Directions* offers new understandings for contemporary times.

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Part 1

Moving Methods, Moving Theories? Advancing Approaches

1

Reflexive Sexualities and Reflexive Sociology¹

Brian Heaphy

Introduction

Since the 1990s some sociologists have discussed sexual identities and lifestyles as 'reflexive' to conceptualize their increasingly self-conscious and self-determined nature. In this chapter I reflect on how reflexivity has, in fact, been a long-standing (if latent) theme in sociological theory and research about lesbian and gay sexualities, and how it is often linked to the privileging of exclusive experience, the inadequate theorizing of power, and to overly affirmative and normative political projects. I argue that future research should be less concerned with reflexive sexualities and more with 'reflexive sociology'. Reflexivity has a wide range of meanings in sociology (Lynch, 2000), and I discuss the topic in two ways. First, I consider recent theories that associate lesbian and gay identities and lifestyles with reflexive self-consciousness, self-determination and empowered agency in everyday living. Second, I consider reflexivity as a methodological issue.

The chapter begins by exploring arguments that suggest lesbian and gay ways of living to be highly reflexive ones. Giddens' (1991, 1992) arguments have been especially influential in this respect, and he explicitly identifies lesbian and gay identities and relationships as exemplars of highly reflexive forms. I then consider a number of analyses of lesbian and gay 'self-making' that address the theme of heightened reflexivity (explicitly or otherwise) to illuminate how this is an enduring theme in theory and research on lesbian and gay life. In doing so, I elucidate different conceptions of lesbian and gay reflexivity, and the implications for theory, politics and research. The chapter then identifies problems that are common to these conceptions. These include the erasure of differences amongst lesbians and gay men, and the inadequate theorizing of power. The resources required for self-fashioned and 'empowered' sexualities are underestimated, and their implications for diverse lesbian and gay experiences are undermined. Our² analyses of lesbian and gay reflexivity tend to assume a fairly universal

subjectivity or form of existence, and imply a lesbian and gay 'ethos' of self-making and self-determination that is closely akin to 'reflexive habitus' (Sweetman, 2003). Thus, they offer a partial understanding of contemporary lesbian and gay lives, and unreflectively affirm exclusive experiences and normative assumptions. This leads to diminished understandings of both contemporary lesbian and gay politics and of the politics of theorizing and researching lesbian and gay lives.

The final sections of the chapter concentrate on the need for future theory and research to shift the emphasis away from lesbian and gay reflexivity and towards 'reflexive sociology'. This entails acknowledging the partial nature of our sociological accounts of lesbian and gay life. By considering broader (long-standing) debates about methodological reflexivity, I identify some of the ways in which a reflexive sociology of sexualities could be conceived and the implications for 'doing' this sociology. I do not propose one model for this or claim one superior way of knowing. There are, however, a number of principles that could be incorporated into our sociological practice. Above all, reflexive sociology acknowledges the partial nature of the narratives we tell about the lives we study, and the political consequences of these. Unlike developments in the sociology of lesbian and gay reflexivity, it entails concentrated and collective efforts to acknowledge how our sociology is involved in the flow of power.

Lesbian and gay reflexivity

Giddens' (1991, 1992) arguments about lesbian and gay sexualities are well known. Via his thesis of reflexive modernization, he suggests these sexualities to be key examples of new personal freedoms in late modernity (that stem from the freeing of agency from structure). His post-emancipatory frame for understanding personal life posits lesbian and gay lifestyles as exemplars of self-fashioned identities; dialogically achieved forms of democratic relating; and life political endeavours. In this frame, Foucault's (1979) emphasis on sexuality as the subject-product of discourse, governance and power is rejected as mistaking the reflexivity (self-consciousness orientated towards control) of modernity for disciplinary operations of power. Foucault's (1985, 1986) later work theorized 'practices of freedom' (and some theorists argue lesbian, gay and queer sexualities to illuminate these, see Halperin, 1995; Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001). These practices are, however, distinct from the new personal 'freedoms' that Giddens deploys lesbian and gay lifestyles to illustrate. For Foucauldians, practices of freedom are tied to the micro politics of resistance. For Giddens, lesbians and gay 'freedoms' are indicative of new opportunities for empowerment and increasing *quanta* of (enabling) power in late modernity. It is not only lesbian and gay sexualities that are becoming emancipated, but also heterosexuality and gender. This stems from a number of interrelated

developments, including the uncoupling of sexuality from the demands of reproduction, increasing gender equality in economic and intimate life, and the decline of institutional heterosexuality. Giddens' argument is that sexuality is being transformed from an emancipatory political issue to a 'life political' one: as sexual liberation is mostly achieved, sexual politics now concerns the negotiation of sexual lifestyle choices.

There are several reasons why Giddens' analysis might be of interest to scholars of lesbian and gay lives. First, it validates and valorizes lesbian and gay life as creative experiments. Second, it disrupts the 'heterosexual panorama' (Blasius, 1994) that tends to characterize mainstream social theorizing. Third, aspects of it seem compatible with elements of Queer theory (especially as it appears to acknowledge lesbian and gay – and heterosexual – sexualities as open 'fictions' and partly aims to transcend the homo-hetero divide). The analysis is also compatible with long-standing arguments about lesbian and gay self-making, forms of existence and politics. Indeed, its originality lies in how it links themes that were already prevalent in theory and research about lesbian and gay lives to broader social theoretical concerns.

Self-making and self-determination are well-rehearsed themes in literature on lesbian and gay life, as is the issue of egalitarian relating. For example, personal and academic accounts of 'coming out' have long emphasized self-fashioning as a response to absence of social supports and cultural guidelines for non-heterosexual identities (e.g., Davies, 1992; Dunne, 1997; Hall Carpenter Archives, 1989a, 1989b; Porter and Weeks, 1990). Self-fashioning is also a theme in research on lesbian and gay couples (e.g., Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983; Harry and DeVall, 1978; Johnson, 1990; Peplau, Venigas and MillerCampbell, 1996); family life (e.g., Nardi, 1992a; Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan, 2001; Weston, 1991), and friendships and communities (e.g., Bev Jo, 1996; Nardi, 1992a, 1992b, 1999; Weinstock and Rothblum, 1996). The theme is also emphasized in theory and research on issues such as (non-)monogamy (see Yip, 1997), ageing (Heaphy, Yip and Thompson, 2004) and parenting (Bozett, 1987; Dunne, 1997; Lewin, 1993).

The personal-political consequence of 'making a life of one's own' is also an established theme in literature from the 1970s onwards, and Giddens' conception of life-politics echoes arguments about lesbian and gay living as political practice (as argued by some feminist and liberationist theorists and captured in the slogan 'the personal is political'). A powerful narrative emerges from the existing literature about how, against the backdrop of institutional or compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1983), lesbians and gay men make the personal *project* of 'becoming' a political one. The personal-political possibilities that such projects enable are, some argue, evident in increasing recognition of the legitimacy of lesbian and gay sexualities. Thus, same-sex marriage, Civil Partnership and other Acts, gay consumer citizenship, and other forms of legal and social recognition, are indicative of changing cultural values *and* of the personal-political achievements of

lesbians and gay men. Such arguments are central to a number of theoretical accounts of lesbian and gay life and politics that, similar to Giddens, have an argument about reflexivity at their core. In the following discussion I highlight theories that have shaped my own sociological understandings of lesbian and gay life. I do so because of my familiarity with them, and not because they are especially problematic.

Mark Blasius' (1994) analysis of lesbian and gay politics is striking for its synthesis of feminist and Foucauldian theory, and for the many similarities between his and Giddens' arguments. Via feminist ideas about institutional heterosexuality and Foucauldian ones about discourse and resistance, Blasius argues that lesbians and gay men are arch self-inventors, whose identities, relationships and lifestyles are underpinned by an ethics of self-invention and egalitarian relating. This 'lesbian and gay ethos' underpins creative and self-determined ways of living and relating that are political because they undermine institutionalized (heterosexual) norms and values. Creating a life in the shadow of hegemonic heterosexuality prompts heightened reflexivity or self-awareness that (via engagement with lesbian and gay community knowledge) enables self- and social transformation. For Blasius, the political import of such reflexivity is evident in how lesbians and gay men have effectively challenged the values and norms of the dominant (heterosexual) culture and are on the cusp of the 'moment of equality'.

Jeffrey Weeks (1991, 1995, 2005, 2007), in various analyses, has theorized lesbian and gay identities as creative fictions that illuminate the possibilities for self-fashioning and self-determination. His arguments are in some ways similar to Blasius' and Giddens', and his later work explicitly incorporates Giddens' ideas. Weeks' and Giddens' ideas are compatible because the issues of self- and relational reflexivity have been latent concerns in the former's work for some time. Weeks has also deployed Foucault's later ideas on 'practices of freedom' to theorize lesbian and gay self-determination. However, Foucault's impoverished notion of agency has long been a sticking point for Weeks. Ultimately, the latter is more concerned with the possibilities of lesbian and gay creativity and self-fashioning (especially as they are mediated through lesbian and gay community values). For Weeks (1995, 2005), reflexivity (awareness of self-creation) is at the heart of lesbian and gay creativity and agency, and the political import of this is evident in that lesbians and gay men have arrived at the 'moment of citizenship'.

Ken Plummer (1995, 2003), in his work on the personal-political nature of sexual storytelling and intimate citizenship, has also been influenced by Giddens' analysis. Giddens' arguments and Plummer's earlier ones about lesbian and gay identity are compatible because the latter's symbolic interactionist approach has, in fact, always had a latent argument about reflexivity at its core. This is evident in his concern with lesbian and gay coming out narratives as personal-political resources – resources that

can facilitate self-fashioning and self-determination, and influence social, cultural and political change. There are also some notable links between aspects of Giddens' arguments and Henning Bech's (1997) phenomenological account of the self-consciousness of modern homosexual forms of existence, although the latter's account of reflexivity is far less voluntaristic than Giddens's. Bech's account emphasizes *reflexion* over *self*-fashioning, but he does, however, argue the case for a shared homosexual form of existence that entails heightened self-awareness. Finally, Sasha Roseneil's (2002) incorporation of Giddens' arguments within a Queer theoretical frame illuminates how (on the surface at least) compatible arguments about reflexivity are with this frame. Roseneil discusses transformations taking place with respect to heteronormativity, and suggests that increasing lesbian and gay *and* heterosexual reflexivity points to radical shifts in the sexual order.

Taken together, the various arguments considered in this part of the chapter tell a powerful story about lesbian and gay lives: that they can be understood as reflexively achieved forms of existence that are the exemplars of the life politics of self-fashioning. All of the arguments seem to imply that lesbian and gay identities and ways of living could be viewed as exemplars of what Sweetman (2003) terms 'reflexive habitus'. Sweetman developed this term to argue that certain groups or experiences might be more inclined to chronic reflexivity than others. Rather than habitus implying fairly solidified ways of being or forms of existence that have their roots in early (classed) experience (as Bourdieu argued), *reflexive* habitus implies constant movement with respect to self-identity and lifestyle construction. Most of the arguments considered so far are consistent with this idea, as they imply that reflexivity penetrates to the heart of lesbian and gay existence.

Common problems in sociological narratives of lesbian and gay reflexivity

Arguments about lesbian and gay reflexivity are appealing because they speak to the agency of lesbians and gay men – in their personal and relational lives, and politically. The disciplinary vision of modern sexualities offered by Foucault and others, some argue, always promoted a one-sided view of lesbian and gay life by overplaying disciplinary forms of sexual subjection. In contrast, arguments about lesbian and gay reflexivity appear to acknowledge personal-political agency and *contemporary* empirical realities. It seems clear, after all, that lesbian and gay sexualities are more 'empowered' and visible in the culture than ever before, and recent legislation in Britain and elsewhere (such as the Civil Partnership and other Acts) seems to promote and defend the legitimacy of same-sex relationships. There are, however, a number of problems with narratives of lesbian and gay reflexivity that should be heeded.